

Listing of Claims:

1 - 27 (Canceled)

28 (Currently Amended) A method for dispensing and evidencing postage indicia by a postage generating device (PGD) in a system having a plurality of PGDs that have been divided into n groups identified by a group designation G_i , $i = 1, \dots, n$, the method performed by the indicia generating devices comprising:

- (a) receiving a master secret key K and a secret key K_i from a distribution center over a network after manufacture, and storing the master secret key K and the secret key K_i in the PGD;
- (b) in response to receiving a request to generate an indicium for a mail piece destined for a particular postal destination $Dest$, generating the indicium;
- (c) computing a verification key V_i^{Dest} as a function of the secret key K_i and the postal destination;
- (d) computing a key ID I_i^{Dest} as a function of the master secret key K and the postal destination;
- (e) using the computed verification key V_i^{Dest} to create a digital signature for the indicia; and
- (f) digitally signing the indicia by including the digital signature and the computed key ID I_i^{Dest} on the indicia.

29 (Original) The method of claim 28 further including the step of computing each verification key V_i^{Dest} as a one-way function H of the PGD group key K_i and a designation of the postal destination:

$$V_i^{Dest} = H(K_i, Dest).$$

- 30 (Original) The method of claim 29 further including the step of using ZIP codes to designate the postal destination.
- 31 (Original) The method of claim 30 further including the step of computing each of the key ID's as a one-way function H of the PGD group, G_i , the master secret key, K , and a designation of the postal destination, $Dest$: